

# Mapping the Market for Sex with Trafficked Minor Girls in Minneapolis: Structures, Functions, and Patterns

Executive Summary and Overview: September 2014

*Research and writing by the University of Minnesota's Urban Research Outreach-Engagement Center and Othayonih Research in partnership with the Women's Foundation of Minnesota.*

## OVERVIEW

**Over the past decade, juvenile sex trafficking in Minnesota has received increased attention from policy makers, law enforcement, service providers, advocates, and funders.** In July 2011, the Minnesota State Legislature passed the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Act which, among other things, had a sunrise clause for implementation by August 2014.

Research on any hidden criminal activity or stigmatized behavior (including this study) is difficult and prone to at least some degree of bias. Consequently, any picture is necessarily partial and incomplete to some degree.

Most previous research on commercial sex and sex trafficking involving minors has focused on examination of common risk factors and risk behaviors and/or a comparison of street versus non-street prostitution in relation to safety. Yet knowledge of the broader mechanics and market forces of sex trafficking as a business is needed to prevent and protect youth from exploitation in commercial sex and sex trafficking.

***Mapping the Market for Sex with Trafficked Minor Girls in Minneapolis* is a first-of-its-kind approach** to understanding how the overall market for juvenile sex trafficking manifests within communities in one city. Though limited to Minneapolis, our findings may have implications for other cities and regions.

### IDENTIFYING THE MARKETPLACE

**Sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children is a market built on exploitation, violence, and brutality.** Like other business activities, the market for sex with juveniles is structured by demand, supply, and a network of players performing key roles.

**Sex buyers** (the “demand”) enter the market with money and power.

**Pimps, traffickers and other facilitators** (transporters, watchers, enforcers, etc.) profit by linking sex buyers to juvenile victims for sale.

**Facilitators** recruit a “supply” of juveniles and prepare them for sale in the market through systematic exploitation of specific needs and vulnerabilities.

### GOALS OF THE STUDY

*Mapping the Market for Sex with Trafficked Minor Girls in Minneapolis* reveals the “who, where, and how” aspects of juvenile sex trafficking by answering the following questions:

- Who are people involved in the market?
- Where does the market happen?
- Where are victims recruited?
- Where do sexual transactions take place?
- What are the residential locations of facilitators, victims, and sex buyers?
- And what operational structures and mechanisms are used to derive profit from the commercial sexual exploitation of juveniles?

# HOW THE MARKET WORKS

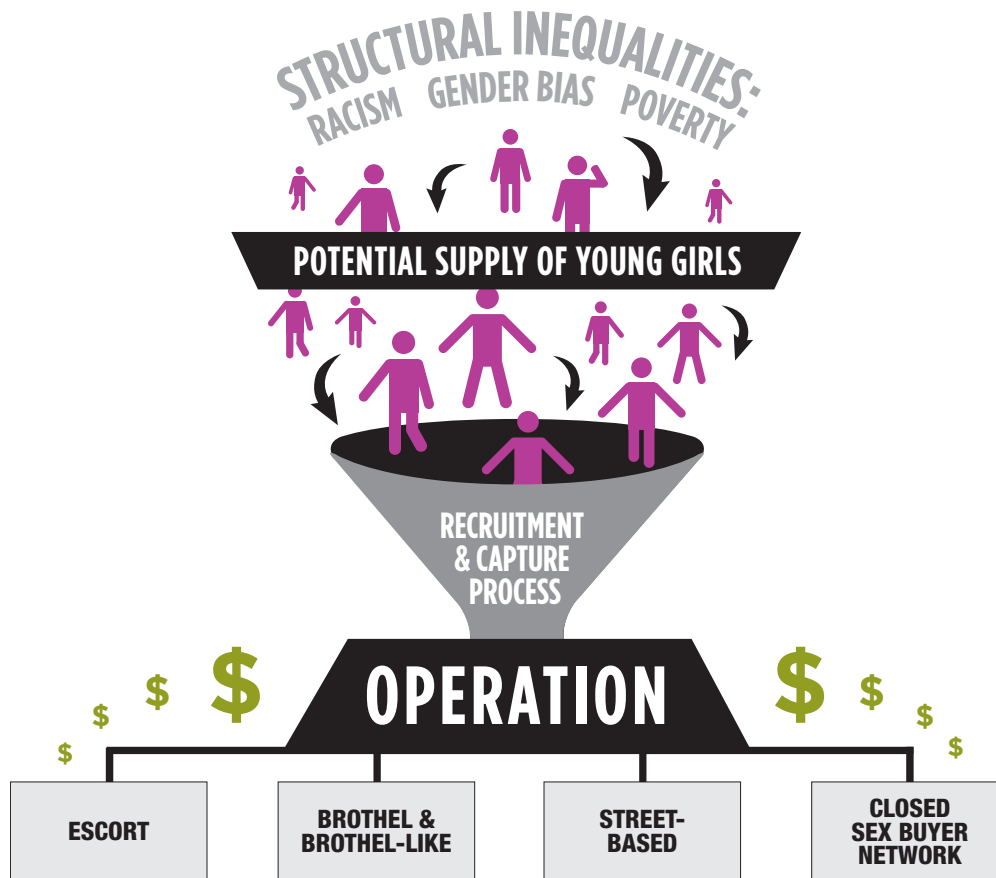


Figure 10: Identified components and relationships of the juvenile sex trafficking market structure

In order to generate profit, each operation must draw from a potential supply of youth. This includes targeting girls with vulnerabilities such as being runaway and/or homeless, living in poverty and/or unable to meet basic needs, experiencing cognitive delay or mental health issues, using drugs or alcohol, and/or absence of social protections against exploitation. Girls in these situations may be engaged in an informal commercial sex market known as “survival sex.” Domestic minor sex trafficking operations draw supply from this informal market, but the boundary between informal sexual exploitation and the formal market is porous. Sex trafficked youth may escape formal operations, blend back into the informal economy, and then be re-captured by another formal operation.

Facilitators rely on a “recruitment and capture” process to transform their supply of vulnerable youth into merchandise that they can sell in the commercial sex market. Victims are then assigned to a particular business model: brothel and brothel-like arrangements, escort, street-based, and closed sex buyers networks. Each model delivers a product to a specific category of buyer. Sometimes the operational structure is bypassed, either by a sex buyer directly soliciting a youth and/or the youth directly marketing to sex buyers. In either case, according to Minnesota law, the sex buyer would be considered a “trafficker.”

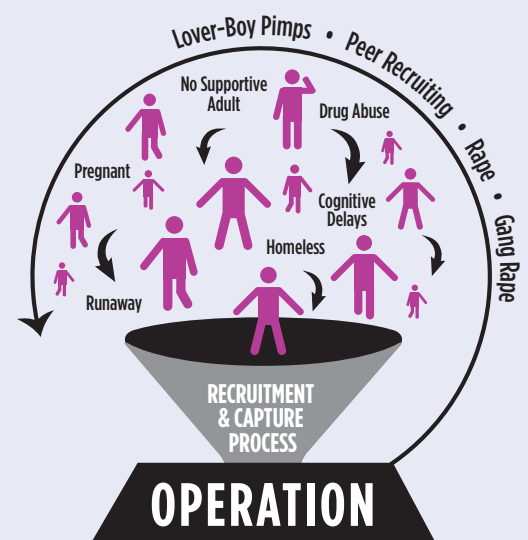
## PRIMARY RECRUITMENT TACTICS ARE:

**“Lover-boy” pimping** in which a facilitator uses romantic relations, care, and love alternated with violence to create a bond.

**Peer-to-peer recruiting** in which a facilitator enlists youth to recruit peers on his behalf through peer-pressure, bullying, insults, dating violence and more. Trafficked peers also recruit friends who are hungry, homeless, and/or in need of money.

**Strategic use of rape, gang rape, and other types of violence** to break a girl and trap her against her will in a sex trafficking situation. It is also used to form a “trauma bond” with a facilitator.

Figure 11: Recruitment process of sex trafficking operations



# DATA COLLECTION

## METHODOLOGY

This study used community-based participatory action research methods to ground the research in real-world perspectives, to ensure validity, and to gather deep and accurate information. This approach has been widely recognized as valuable in producing findings that are useful for practical application in solving complex problems. The research process is built on trust, involving ongoing relationships with and input from a wide range of stakeholders.

The study is the result of interviews with stakeholders, an analysis of media reports, Minneapolis Police Department case records and Hennepin County District Court documents. Since each of these data sources has inherent strengths and weaknesses, researchers used triangulation to compare information from each data source to create, verify and validate the overall picture of the market and how it functions.

Figure 1: Number and category of interviews completed



## INTERVIEWS

One data source was interviews with 89 adults who are knowledgeable about juvenile sex trafficking activities in Minneapolis and/or work directly with prostituted girls (Fig. 1).

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Researchers collected and analyzed all available records from law enforcement cases and court prosecutions related to juvenile sex trafficking in Minneapolis from 2008 to 2013. These included 86 cases from the Minneapolis Police Department and 41 prosecutions in Hennepin County District Court. They also collected and analyzed prior police contact information on all individuals in the MPD cases (Fig. 2).

## MEDIA COVERAGE

Trends over time in media coverage of domestic minor sex trafficking from 2007-2013 were analyzed, as well (Fig. 3).

Figure 2: Number of MPD juvenile sex trafficking investigations, Jan 2008-Sept 2013

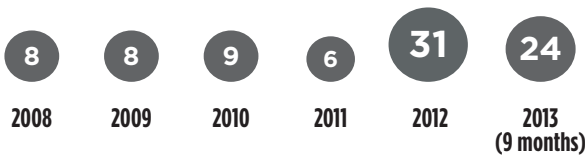


Figure 3: Number of juvenile sex trafficking-related media articles, Twin Cities 2007-2013



# WHO IS INVOLVED?

The study identified:

**79** VICTIMS      **50** FACILITATORS      **23** SEX BUYERS

**The study focused on girls.** Victims tend to be young girls of color from communities characterized by poverty. The study highlighted multiple types of vulnerability including: prior victimization and child abuse/neglect, poverty, running away from home, substance use, cognitive and behavioral disabilities, and friends or families involved in trafficking.

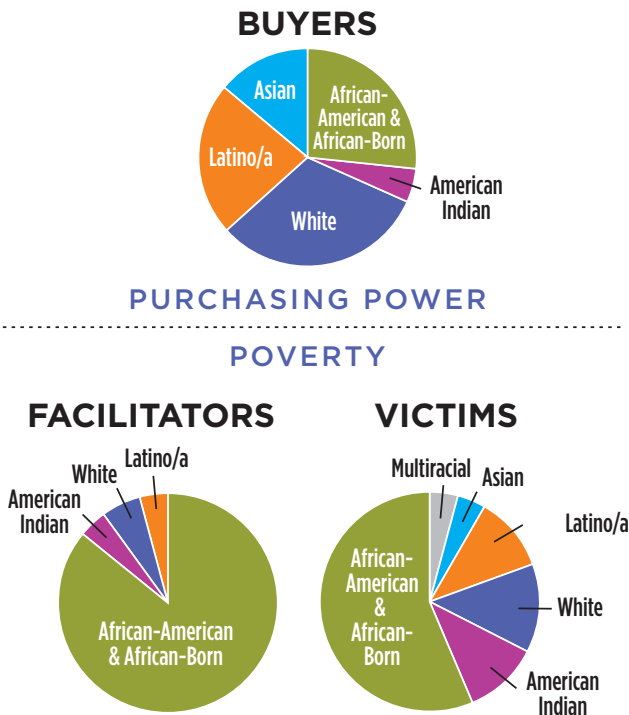
Facilitators tend to be men of color, also from communities living in poverty. They range in age from late teens to mid-50s. Younger facilitators tend to work for older men and learn how to be facilitators in that way. Data suggest that young facilitators may have several risk factors in common with their victims, including prior victimization and child abuse/neglect, running away from home, poverty, and proximity to sex trafficking.

Sex buyers tend to be men from all communities and socio-economic backgrounds across the entire Twin Cities Metro area. The degree of purchasing power determines where and how they purchase and obtain sex with minor victims.

# MINNEAPOLIS POLICE DEPARTMENT DATA

Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) records on juvenile sex trafficking cases:

Figure 4: Police-identified race of people involved



Sex buyers, facilitators, and victims in cases investigated by suburban law enforcement are not included in these data.

Figure 5: Average age of people involved by role and racial category

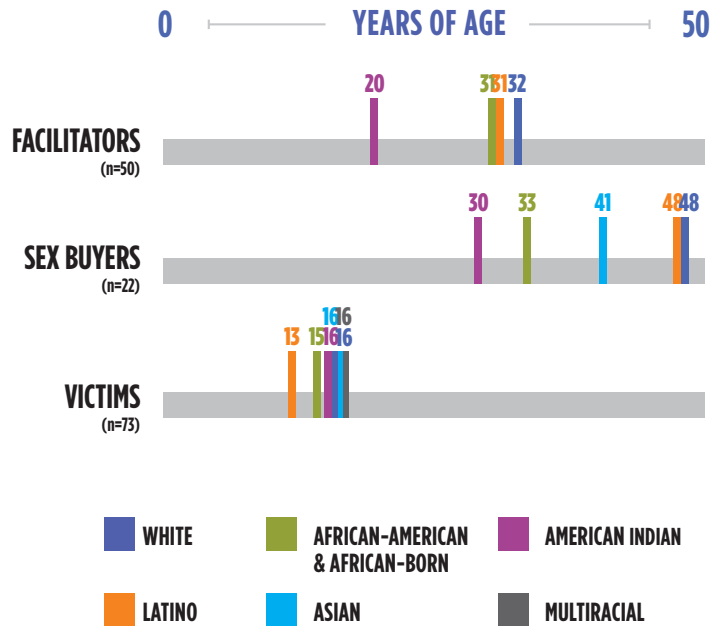
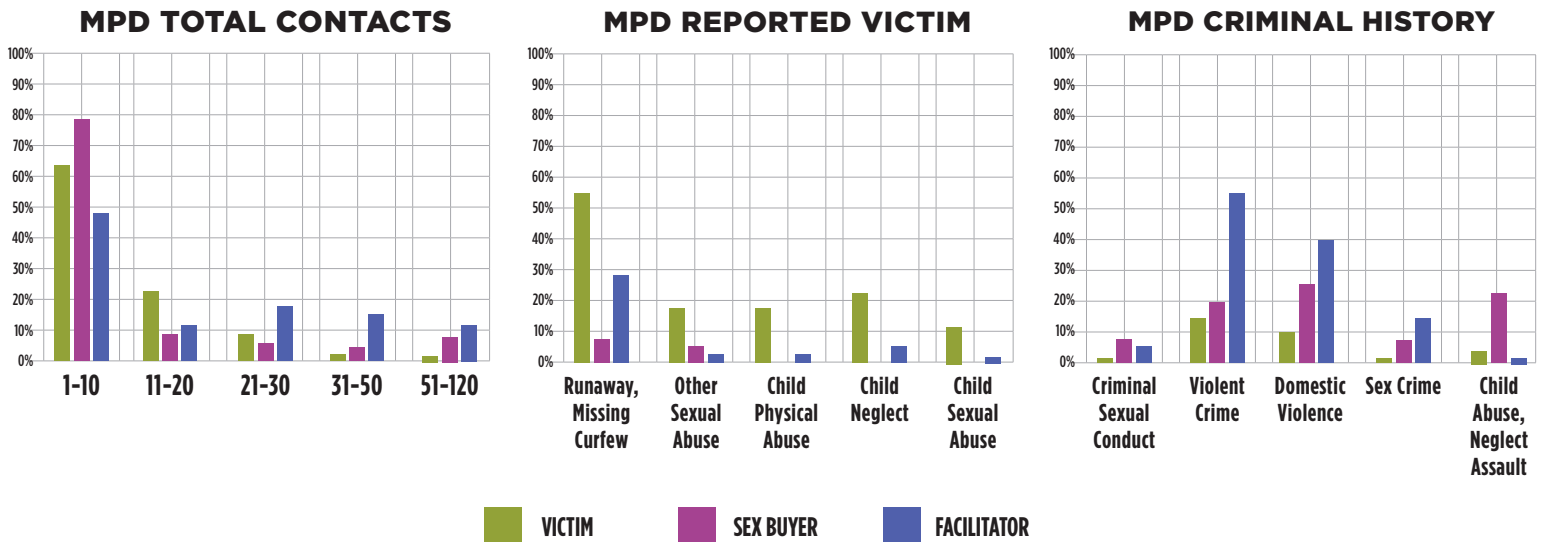


Figure 4 describes the role of poverty and purchasing power in structuring the market. Within that framework we see a predominance of victims of color who are exploited by facilitators, often from within their communities, and sex buyers that come from all communities. These data represent only information collected from MPD case files. All people of African descent are labeled in MPD case files as African-American. However, we know that some proportion of the cases involved facilitators and sex buyers who were African- and Caribbean-born men. Our other sources and the literature suggest that a much higher proportion of sex buyers and facilitators are white men living in suburban areas who exploit girls based in Minneapolis. They are, therefore, unlikely to be investigated by Minneapolis police.

Figure 6: MPD contacts with people involved



# WHERE SEX TRAFFICKING HAPPENS

Minneapolis Police Department data indicate that recruitment of girls for commercial sex happens most often in three primary areas of Minneapolis: downtown, north Minneapolis, and the Phillips neighborhood. Juvenile sex trafficking transactions are also concentrated in those areas, as well as in first and second ring suburbs. Data include residential location information for facilitators, victims and sex buyers.

As the maps show, facilitators and victims both tend to reside in north Minneapolis and in the Phillips neighborhood of south Minneapolis. Sex buyers are more dispersed across Minneapolis and the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Statistical analysis showed both of these residential patterns to be statistically significant.

**Case data and interviews highlight the types of locations most impacted by the market:**

**Facilitators and victims generally reside in neighborhoods with high rates of poverty.** Sources also suggested that some girls come from small towns in rural Minnesota and Wisconsin to these two areas of Minneapolis.

Locations where youth are recruited and captured into operations include **schools, parks, shelters and youth programming, juvenile detention and treatment facilities, streets, bus stops, libraries, malls,** and other places where youth congregate socially (Fig. 7).

**Sexual transactions primarily occur at sex buyers' homes, hotels in the Minneapolis suburbs, and streets easily accessed by commuters.** Some party-based transactions are held in "trap houses" and "train" parties, described by interviewees as places where girls are lured under false pretenses, kept against their will and forced or coerced to have sex with multiple buyers. Commercial sex parties with juvenile victims are also held in tourist and entertainment locations such as in hotels, on boats, and at bachelor parties.

Figure 7: Common recruitment locations identified by stakeholders



All map locations are generalized to the block level—no specific addresses were used.

Figure 8: General residential locations of SEX BUYERS

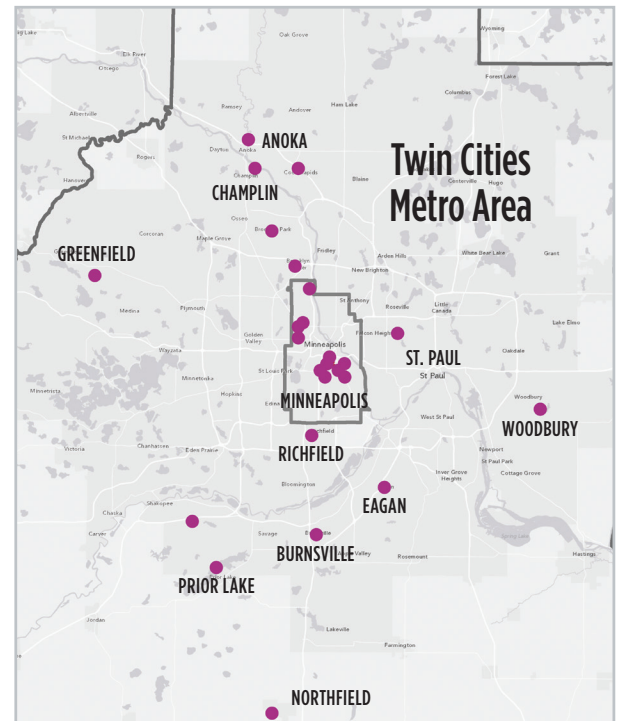
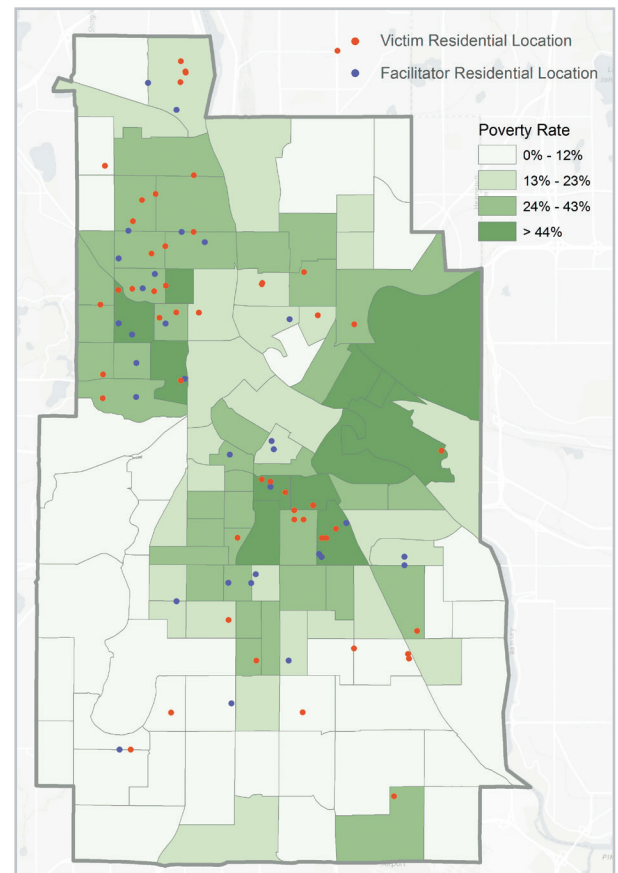


Figure 9: General residential locations of FACILITATORS and VICTIMS, by poverty rate



## What can you do?

**Deepen your understanding of child sex trafficking in America.** Read *Walking Prey: How America's Youth Are Vulnerable to Sex Slavery*, by Holly Austin Smith. Also, watch Rachel Lloyd's internationally acclaimed Showtime documentary, *Very Young Girls* (available on Netflix).

**Deepen your understanding of child sex trafficking in Minnesota.** Visit the Women's Foundation of Minnesota's MN Girls Are Not For Sale campaign at WFMN.ORG.

**Talk to the boys and men in your life about sex trafficking.** Men are at the core of this issue, both as facilitators and buyers. To stop the demand, men must be the drivers of the solution.

**Talk to school teachers, social workers, counselors and others to look for the signs of a possible victim, including:** multiple unexplained absences from school; repeated tendency to run away from home; frequent travel to other cities; older boyfriends or girlfriends; a sudden ability to have expensive items; and/or depression or physical injuries.

**Talk to your school** and ask that information which protects children from sexual exploitation be included in school curriculum.

**Monitor your child's use of the Internet and sites visited, including his/her cell phone.**

**Intervene early to support pathways to prosperity and safety for youth** by mentoring and volunteering at local youth organizations, including the Boys & Girls Club of the Twin Cities, The Bridge for Youth, Urban Ventures, YMCA, YouthCARE, Youth Farm, YWCA, and more.

**Be aware of street activities and take note of girls you suspect may be at risk of harm and/or sexual exploitation.** Do not question your concern. Trust your instincts and call 911 immediately.

**Contact your local, state and federal elected officials and judges** to make them aware of your concern for this issue, support for policies and sentencing that protects victims, and support for continued and increased state funding for Minnesota's Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door program.

**Make a financial donation to culturally-responsive nonprofits working to address child sex trafficking in Minnesota, including:** the Women's Foundation of Minnesota (MN Girls Are Not For Sale campaign), Breaking Free, The Advocates for Human Rights, MN Indian Women's Resource Center, Casa de Esperanza, Cornerstone Advocacy Services, Life House, The Link, PAVSA, The Family Partnership, 180 Degrees, Heartland Girls Ranch, Kwanzaa's Northside Women's Space, WATCH, and more.

## For more information on this project and to view/download the full report: [uroc.umn.edu/sextrafficking](http://uroc.umn.edu/sextrafficking)

This project was jointly designed and conducted by Lauren Martin\* and Alexandra Pierce.\*\* Ana Isabel Gabilondo and Girija Tulpule served as research assistants. Nancy Dunlap gathered Minneapolis Police Department data. Stephen Peyton geo-coded the data, created maps and conducted spatial analysis. Fred Maceno assisted with data entry. Tammy Owens provided support for some interviews. We thank the many people who provided direction, input and support for this project.

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\**Director of Research, University of Minnesota's Urban Research Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC) which links University of Minnesota researchers and expertise in partnership with communities on critical urban issues. For more information on UROC's initiative Sex Trading, Trafficking and Community Well-being, visit [uroc.umn.edu/sextrafficking](http://uroc.umn.edu/sextrafficking).*

\*\**President, Othayonih Research, an applied research firm that has been conducting survivor-led research on sex trafficking since 2008. More at [othayonihresearch.com](http://othayonihresearch.com).*



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